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OF THE COURTS

Center for Families,
Children & the Courts

Center for Judicial and
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FACT SHEET

May 2003

Violence Against Women Education Project

Domestic violence and sexual assault are critical issues facing family, criminal, and juvenile courts in California. The Violence Against Women Education Project (VAWEP) is an initiative designed to provide the courts with information, educational materials, and training on the court's role in responding to these cases. VAWEP is a collaborative project of the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) housed in two of its staff divisions: the Center for Families, Children & the Courts (CFCC) and Education Division/Center for Judicial Education and Research (CJER). The project is funded by the Governor's Office of Criminal Justice Planning (OCJP) with resources from the federal Office on Violence Against Women (OVW). The project's planning committee, comprised of judicial officers, attorneys, victim advocates, and other experts, guides the project staff in identifying key training issues and developing appropriate educational programming. Major efforts for the development and augmentation of educational events and curricula related to domestic violence and sexual assault are currently under way.

Project Mission

The mission of VAWEP is to:

- Identify primary educational and information needs of the courts on domestic violence and sexual assault issues;
- Initiate new and enhance existing judicial-branch educational programming pertaining to domestic violence and sexual assault;
- Develop and compile useful information for the courts on domestic violence and sexual assault issues that relates specifically to California law;
- Institutionalize inclusion of domestic violence and sexual assault issues in all relevant judicial-branch education curricula, programs, and publications; and
- Create incentives designed to increase attendance and participation in judicial branch education relating to domestic violence and sexual assault.

Educational Events

Events planned by the collaborating AOC divisions are the following:

Domestic Violence Workshops at the Family Violence and the Courts Conference (May 2002)

Eighteen enhanced training workshops on issues related to domestic violence were presented as part of the AOC-sponsored Family Violence and the Courts conference. The content included: issues of domestic violence and immigration, what works in domestic violence courts, and the enforceability of restraining orders.

Domestic Violence Roundtable (May 2002)

Judicial officers attended an interactive and facilitated roundtable discussion on domestic violence issues and their educational needs in this critical arena. The roundtable served as a project focus group and needs assessment. The information gathered from this roundtable formed the basis for future project planning.

Domestic Violence Judicial Institute (May 2003)

This judicial education program, which will be open to more than 60 criminal, juvenile, and family court judicial officers, will utilize a national interdisciplinary curriculum developed by the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges and the Family Violence Prevention Fund. The program will include workshops on fact finding, judicial officers' roles in a community response to domestic violence, fairness and cultural issues in domestic violence cases, decision-making skills and enforcement, victim behavior, and perpetrator behavior. The program will also include sessions designed to engage judicial officers in practical courtroom exercises addressing the complexity of domestic violence cases and the specific issues facing California judicial officers.

Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Courses, Judicial College (June 2003)

Courses on issues of both domestic violence and sexual assault will be delivered as part of the nationally recognized B. E. Witkin Judicial College of California, a program providing comprehensive education for all new superior court judges, commissioners, and referees. The courses will provide information related to issues of domestic violence trials, domestic violence awareness, and the criminal courts' response to sexual assault cases. This year marks the first year that a course dedicated entirely to issues of sexual assault has been offered. Attendance at the domestic violence awareness course is a requirement for all college attendees.

Sexual Assault Program, Summer Continuing Judicial Studies Program (CJSP) (August 2003)

A day-long course on sexual assault will be convened at CJSP, a forum designed to meet the advanced educational needs of experienced judges. Presented twice during the program, the course will be based on a national curriculum, *Understanding Sexual Violence: The Judicial Response to Stranger and Non-stranger Rape and Sexual Assault*, developed by the National Judicial Education Program (NJEP). An interdisciplinary team of judicial officers, attorneys, and sexual assault experts will create a California-specific adaptation of this widely admired model curriculum and will pilot the curriculum at CJSP.

Safety for Victims and Accountability of Batterers in the Family Court– An Interactive Symposium (July 2003)

Judicial officers, victims' advocates, family court professionals, and attorneys will meet to discuss the critical issues of safety and accountability in family law cases. The discussion will be structured, will address crucial and controversial issues relating to victims of domestic violence and their experience in family courts, and will form the basis for a judicial education curriculum on these issues. The discussion will be transcribed using computer-based meeting technology that will maximize participation and provide an immediate record of the proceedings. The information gathered will also provide an outline and baseline information for a policy pamphlet to be issued and published by the AOC's Center for Families, Children & the Courts.

Curriculum Development and Publications

VAWEP is developing the following curricula and publications:

Legal Update, Judicial Curriculum – Domestic Violence: What Every Judge Should Know.

This curriculum, developed for use in California, focuses on issues of clarifying myths about domestic violence, the role of judicial officers in domestic violence cases, behavioral and legal definitions of domestic violence, evidentiary issues, and restraining orders, among other issues. The curriculum will be updated to include recent changes to case law and distributed as needed to faculty for programs that include domestic violence issues. Student materials based on the curriculum will be available where relevant.

Legal Update, Court Employee Curriculum – Serving the Public in Domestic Violence Cases.

This curriculum was designed to address the information needs of all court employees who may come into contact with parties in domestic violence cases. It addresses issues such as definitions of and statistics about domestic violence, public service in domestic violence cases, and safety in court for both litigants and staff. The curriculum will be updated to include several position-specific modules for varying types of court personnel and will also be updated to include recent changes to case law. The curriculum will be available for use by faculty teaching at programs designed for court employees and will be the basis for future stand-alone programming for court staff on domestic violence.

Protective Order Bench Manual.

This manual will focus on orders that apply in both sexual assault and domestic violence cases. The manual will clearly and concisely explain the various protective orders and their legal requirements and legal effects, and will help judicial officers make effective and appropriate orders in these cases. The manual will be published, distributed to all judicial officers, and posted on a web site for judicial officers.

Annual Report and Fact Sheet

Project staff will develop an annual report and fact sheet for the VAWEP that will highlight key efforts the project has undertaken and judicial and court response to those efforts. These documents will be distributed to provide judicial branch professionals and the public with project information. As educational tools, they will highlight best practices and innovative approaches.

Further Information

For additional information about VAWEP activities, please contact:

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